

Commission on the Status of Men**Meeting Minutes**

December 4 2009

Concord NH

1. Call to Order/Introduction of the Commissioners and Guests – **Chairman Joe Mastromarino informed Cam that he would be late. Commissioner Lauren is with his ailing father and will not attend. Members Larry Colby, Michael Geanoulis, Scott Meyer and Cam Sinclair were in attendance. One seat on the Commission remains empty awaiting the Governor and Governor's Executive Council approval of one of several interested applicants. Guests were: Greg Brede, David Johnson, James Marques and Michael Puia. Members agreed to call the meeting to order at 1:06 prior to Joe's arrival**
2. Adopt Agenda – **Larry moved to adopt the agenda**
Motion: Larry 2nd: Cam Discussion: Scott asked to add item f. under Unfinished Business, Commission Intern, and item g. NHCSM Letter to the White House. Michael requested the change in wording to item c. under New Business from 'Uninvolved Dads' to 'The Causes and Consequences of Father Absence.' The agenda was adopted with changes unanimously
3. Secretary's Report/Approval of October Minutes – **Larry distributed minutes and informed members that the 1st draft he had emailed was incomplete. He suggested members should check the last items especially. He moved to accept the minutes**
Motion: Larry 2nd: Scott Discussion: In item 12, NHCSM Intern, Mike asked that KSC be spelled out (Keene State College) and Scott added clarification to the minutes in the same item. The corrected minutes were accepted unanimously. Larry will make corrections and forward them to Scott Garman for the NHCSM website
4. Treasurer's Report – **Larry will try to get the balance during break.**
 - a. NE Fathering Conference Sponsorship: Bill Payment - **Larry also will check the status of the \$500 dollars to be used for support of the 11th Annual New England Fathering Conference**

Commissioner Mastromarino arrived and recognized guest Mike Puia to present testimony. Mr. Puia is a NH marital master and raised two issues: Delays in the court system and especially the Family Court structure mean unnecessarily long separations between parents and children and especially fathers. The child support system in NH is also problematic as it is used excessively to deny fathers contact with their children. Mr. Puia estimated that of those parents that need to use the courts to get supervised contact with their children at least 80% are men. Mike talked about DivorceCare for Kids (DC4K), a faith-based national curriculum and recommended that standards for visitation be created. Mike teaches a DC4K course in the state. Mr. Puia added a third area he feels strongly about: more male involvement in schools would help children, the school system, families and communities. Commissioner Colby echoed the sentiment and said he became a member of the Commission for this primary reason and he planned to lobby hard to make male

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involvement in education a major focus in the next two year cycle for the Commission. Chairman Mastromarino thanked Mr. Puiia for his testimony

5. **Web Site Update – Larry sent Scott Garman the September minutes w/ attachments. They were not yet posted on the website as of 12-2-09**
6. **Unfinished Business**
 - a. **Commission Seat Update – 2 min – Joe reported that he had tried over the last two days to see if any progress had been made by the Governor’s office/Executive Council and had no luck. Mike offered a motion that each Commissioner contact their particular Councilor and ask when they anticipated the empty seat being filled**
Motion: Michael 2nd: Scott Discussion: All agreed with this approach and will follow through before the next meeting and report back
 - b. **Fathering Outreach/Posters – Scott shared two new drafts (attached). Larry and Mike liked the 2nd one and suggested NH be spelled out. Mike further suggested that the alignment be changed and that the NHCSM website and mission statement be added. Cam suggested a finished poster could be reproduced and distributed to DHHS (Department of Health and Human Services) offices as well as courts and other locations. Scott offered a motion to talk with graphic designer, Tim Palmison, and ask him to make the changes and to attend the January meeting**
Motion: Scott 2nd: Larry Discussion: None further and passed
 - c. **Legislative Initiatives – Michael reported that HB 139 which he had brought up last meeting was still under consideration. HB 139 basically promotes comparable parenting and in cases where it is denied by a court order asks that the reason be stated in writing. He also spoke to a bill waiting to be introduced by Representative Perkins calling for an audit of child support enforcement. Mike said he would contact Representative Bickford to ask about other bills of interest to the Commission and may invite Bickford to appear**
 - d. **Model Paternity Bill Update – No further information available**
 - e. **NH HHS Commissioner Toumpas/ Neal Boutin Invitation Update – Joe has still not received a response and will try again**
 - f. **Commission Intern – Scott will contact Executive Councilor Ray Burton to discuss the result of discussions about the Councilor’s intern doing some tasks for the Commission**
 - g. **NHCSM Letter/Girls and Women – Scott referenced the April 2009 Commission letter to President Obama praising the establishment of the White House Council on Women and Girls and asking him to consider establishing a White House Council on Men and Boys. Scott was mainly concerned that the letter had never been acknowledged. Mike suggested writing a new letter that talks about the initial letter and request and sending it with a return receipt requested stamp. Larry suggested sending via the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships which sponsored the forum on fathering in July. Scott said he will draft a second letter and share it with members via email**

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7. Public Input I – Greg Brede offered testimony about his situation after adding his support of HB 139 and the adoption of visitation guidelines. Mr. Brede lost visitation rights in October of 2007 until April of 2008 because of abuse allegations. In a 15 minute session in April 2008 he was informed that the abuse case was closed due to no findings and supervised visits were reestablished with his children. During this six-month period he was not accorded the chance to tell his side of any story. In October of 2008 another allegation surfaced and Greg was immediately cleared by DCYF (Department of Children Youth and Families) because of another no finding. During divorce proceedings in court at that time, a judge said that the mother had lied, according to Mr. Brede, and ordered the parents to have 50/50 % custody. The marital master suggested that the parties ‘give it time’ in order to allow their children and parties to adjust. By January 2009 Mr. Brede was still not being allowed unsupervised visits and in February supervised visits were halted. In April of this year a 2nd marital master suggested, according to Mr. Brede’s testimony, ‘get the dad and children outside ARK with supervision.’ *(All R Kids is a supervised visitation center providing a home-like setting for parents and children to meet in safety. The visitation center is used by parents who are separated from their children due to domestic violence situations, foster care or other circumstances where a child’s safety and well-being may be at risk).* At the time of his testimony Mr. Brede was still not being allowed time with his children and he testified that the next possible chance to change this situation will be in February 2010

Mr. David Johnson also testified. He stated that the VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) was ‘killing men’ in NH and across the country. Mr. Johnson’s condemnation also included the court system in NH calling many judges and marital masters, ‘liabilities in the state.’ He went on to name Phillip Cross, Michael Ryan, Edward Kelly, Patricia Coffee, and John Broderick as among these liabilities and suggested they should be removed and ‘I’m going to take them down...no matter what it takes.’ His other concerns included:

- ‘Courts are doing nothing but hurting men’
- NH DHHS (Department of Health and Human Services) ‘is taking federal dollars and giving it to courts’ to the detriment of NH men
- NHCSM (NH Commission on the Status of Men) has an empty seat and he wants it filled
- Shared parenting is important to children
- The NHCSW (NH Commission on the Status of Women) has state funding while NHCSM has none including no mileage reimbursement

Commissioners thanked Mr. Brede and Mr. Johnson for their participation

8. New Business
- a. Officer Duties and Responsibilities - Larry asked to table this item and members agreed
 - b. Third NHCSM Biennial Report – Larry asked what the three major themes are. Mike offered to draft an outline of items the Commission has worked with over the

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last two years and suggested Commissioners will be able to use the draft as a starting point for the report

c. Causes and Consequences of Father Absence – **Larry shared his enote to Malcolm Smith and John Badalament with their bios (enote attached). Both men are family educators and lecturers. The note requests their insights/information about father absence, specifically: of the men not involved with their children, are more uninvolved because of court/legal orders or because they choose to be uninvolved**

d. VAWA (Violence Against Women Act)/Polygraph Examinations of Sexual Assault/Sexual Abuse Victims – **Commissioner Geanoulis again expressed his dissatisfaction of the August 1 2008 memo from Kelly Ayotte, NH Attorney General. The memo basically reminds NH law enforcement personnel that federal funding is contingent upon a guarantee that alleged victims of sexual abuse will not be forced to take a lie detector test. Mike's point is that money from the feds is going to support a court/legal system in the state that at times encourages the separation of fathers from their children. Sometimes the separation is based upon a false allegation made by mothers that cannot be challenged. Michael would like to draft a letter to the Attorney General (now Michael A. Delaney) asking for a reconsideration of the 8-1-08 memo**

e. **Michael asked Commissioners if there was an interest in purchasing seven copies of the NFI (National Fatherhood Initiative) publication, 'Father Facts, fifth edition' and offered a motion to do so. Larry seconded and Commissioners agreed to the purchase**

9. Announcements

a. **New England Fathering Conference – March 17 – 19 2010, Newport RI – Larry reminded members again of this important meeting for dads and suggested his hope that men from NH and from the Commission would be able to go.**

b. **Reminder: No December meeting**

10. Public Input II - **Jim Marques**

Next Meeting: Friday January 29 1:00 – 3:30 PM
Legislative Office Building Room 206
Concord NH